

ARTICLE APPEARED
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WASHINGTON POST
30 September 1984

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Atrocities By 'Our' Side in Nicaragua

Since the CIA unleashed the "*contra*" forces in a secret war to overthrow the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua, it has become difficult if not impossible for the agency to control what its surrogates are doing.

My associate Jon Lee Anderson has been traveling extensively in Central America for two years, covering both sides of the covert war in Nicaragua. He has reported on the atrocities committed by the communist elements in this turbulent region.

He has also uncovered numerous instances of brutality and corruption among the CIA-backed *contras*. Here are some of the incidents that could blacken the CIA's efforts:

- Ray Hooker, a respected Nicaraguan educator and candidate for the national assembly in the forthcoming election, was kidnapped on Sept. 5 by

CIA-backed *contras*. He was last seen waving off would-be rescuers, apparently in fear that his captors would kill him on the spot. He hasn't been heard from since.

- Last summer a well-known *contra* commander, a former Somoza-era National Guard officer who called himself "Suicide," went on a homicidal rampage after his wife was killed. He attacked a border town, killing several civilians, and later executed dozens of Sandinista prisoners.

CIA agents ordered him placed under arrest, and the *contra* leadership agreed. According to rumors, the *contras* have since disposed of their troublesome colleague with a bullet in the head.

- My associate was told by a Misura Indian commander that his units routinely execute prisoners—after first torturing them to obtain informa-

tion. He explained in grisly detail how the hapless prisoners of war were finished off, and said: "For the killing of prisoners we use our youngest boys, 14 and 15 years old. They are the best for this because they are too young to have learned a conscience."

- A month ago, in one of the Indian camps, the chief of Misura's military operations told my associate in a burst of candor: "I love killing. I have been killing for the past seven years. There's nothing I like better. If I could, I'd kill several people a day."

- *Contras* of the CIA's favorite rebel group, the FDN, have told my associate matter-of-factly that captured Sandinista soldiers who showed no inclination to join the anti-government rebels were shot—again, after being tortured for information. The same treatment was meted out to suspected spies, snitches and collaborators in communities occupied, however briefly, by the *contras*.

The marked exception to the *contras'* brutal treatment of Sandinista prisoners and sympathizers is in the units led by Eden Pastora, the former Sandinista who survived a news conference bombing at his base camp on the Costa Rican border this year.

Far from executing his captives, Pastora goes to great lengths to win them over to the anti-Sandinista cause. If the conversion effort fails, he turns the prisoners over to the Costa Rican Red Cross to be returned home to Nicaragua.

Unfortunately, the CIA can claim no credit for Pastora's decency. He operates without American aid.

The moral question is this: Should the United States support anti-communists who kidnap, torture and murder their victims just because the other side engages in the same inhumanity?

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